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RHMFIS/USCENTCOM SPECIAL HANDLING MACDILL AFB FL
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DEPT FOR NEA/FO, NEA/ELA
ALSO FOR IO A/S BRIMMER
P FOR DRUSSELL, RRANGASWAMY
PARIS FOR JMILLER
USUN FOR WOLFF/GERMAIN/SCHEDLBAUER
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DOD/OSD FOR FLOURNOY/KAHL/DALTON
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AF, IR, IS, IZ, LE, SY
SUBJECT: LEBANON: SLEIMAN TELLS PETRAEUS CABINET WILL BE
FORMED IN TEN DAYS

Classified By: Classified By: Ambassador Michele J. Sison for reasons 1
.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) In a June 30 meeting with David Petraeus, Commanding General of U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM), President Michel Sleiman noted that he was relatively optimistic and said he expected cabinet formation to last somewhere between ten days and two weeks. Sleiman remarked that Lebanon faced a new situation and immediately thanked Petraeus for the continued U.S. military support to the LAF, adding that the Government of Lebanon looks forward to continued cooperation with the United States. Petraeus briefed the President on regional developments regarding the situation in Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan. Petraeus also discussed the potential for engagement with Syria while it allows terrorist facilitators to operate from Syrian soil to send suicide bombers to Iraq; Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps-Quds Force interference in Iraq and Afghanistan; and the possible outcome of the Iranian elections. Sleiman repeated his frequent message that there should be no regional peace agreement requiring permanent settlement of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon.

¶2. (C) During his one day visit to Lebanon on June 30, U.S. CENTCOM Commander General David Petraeus, accompanied by the Ambassador, met with Lebanese President Michel Sleiman at Baabda Palace. Others at the meeting were Colonel Bjarne (Michael) Iverson, Executive Officer; Colonel Mike Bell, Director-Commander's Initiatives Group; Sadi Othman, Cultural Advisor and Translator; Ali Khedery, Advisor; Lieutenant Colonel Dave Wilson, Lebanon Desk Officer, Embassy Defense Attaché Lieutenant Colonel James Lantz and Embassy notetaker.

CABINET FORMATION

¶3. (C) Sleiman described the current political atmosphere as good, noting that the situation in Lebanon had progressed. He stated that he was relatively optimistic that it would

take ten days to two weeks for PM-designate Saad Hariri to form a new cabinet. When asked if the opposition insisted on having a veto power (or a "blocking-third") in the cabinet, Sleiman said the discussions had been different compared to in Doha in 2008.

¶4. (C) Sleiman said that this was the first time in 50 years that the Lebanese were forming a government without foreign interference. He noted that the 2008 cabinet formation process was plagued by international interference as a result of the deals made during the 2008 Doha Agreement. Sleiman said that Christian opposition leader Michel Aoun still had influence, but was weaker as a result of the elections. The number of MPs Aoun controls decreased, but he still has a significant bloc within Parliament, Sleiman added.

NO PERMANENT RESETTLEMENT OF
PALESTINIAN REFUGEES IN LEBANON

¶5. (C) Sleiman worried that recent remarks made by Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu suggesting Palestinian refugees should return to somewhere other than Israel would be detrimental for Lebanon's future stability. (Note: Lebanon has 12 Palestinian refugee camps and the Government of Lebanon adamantly opposes permanent resettlement ("tawteen") in Lebanon. End Note.) Sleiman emphasized the Palestinian right of return was particularly important and that Lebanon could not support permanent resettlement of Palestinians because they were the ones who caused the 1975-90 civil war. The Palestinians' weapons also pose a concern to Lebanon's stability, he said. Petraeus answered that the United States was sensitive to this issue and how it also effects countries

with Palestinian refugee populations, such as Syria and Jordan. Petraeus mentioned that he did support Lieutenant General Keith Dayton's actions to assist Palestinian Authority security forces in Jordan.

FUTURE U.S./LEBANON
MILITARY RELATIONSHIP

¶6. (C) Sleiman thanked Petraeus for continued United States support to the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF). Petraeus said CENTCOM was preparing to host an interagency discussion via teleconference on where to go next and how to continue the momentum developed before the Lebanese elections by providing training, assistance, and the acquisition of fixed-wing aircraft, helicopters, and combat equipment. The U.S. wants to continue training LAF soldiers, while assisting the LAF to acquire an appropriate, low-cost, fixed-wing aircraft; light attack helicopters; and wheeled, armored vehicles with a vee-shaped hull, Petraeus added. The United States also wants to construct a compound to allow the presence of a small cadre of permanent USG-trainers in Lebanon for LAF soldiers. This arrangement may require additional diplomatic passports for U.S. military personnel, Petraeus suggested.

¶7. (C) Petraeus said he would meet with Minister of Defense Elias Murr and LAF Commander General Jean Kahwagi during this June 30 visit (septel), adding that the relationship with both officials was very good. Petraeus stated, "Murr and Kahwagi have our full support." In particular, Petraeus hoped that Murr would remain as Defense Minister, noting that Murr had been particularly skillful in his officer selections and in the gradual buildup of the LAF's capabilities. He added that continued training of LAF soldiers was a major element of the United States' contribution to the LAF. It may be less visible than hardware, but is often more important, he noted.

SYRIA'S ROLE
IN THE REGION

¶8. (C) Petraeus said Syria, recently, had been somewhat more helpful than in the past stemming the flow of foreign fighters into Iraq, and noted that the number of such

fighters entering Iraq from Syria had decreased. However, the problem continues: not only do foreign fighters and suicide bombers continue to come into Iraq from Syria, but the Syrian regime allows foreign fighter facilitator cadres to base themselves in Syrian territory, Petraeus said. In time, these fighters will turn on their Syrian hosts and begin conducting attacks against Bashar al-Assad's regime itself, Petraeus predicted.

¶19. (C) Petraeus also noted that during his trip to Cairo, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak had been "very encouraged" by Lebanon's elections. Mubarak told him that he had met with King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia and the two wanted to persuade Syrian President Asad to turn his back on Iran. The Egyptians want the Syrians to realize that their future lies with the Arab world and the West, not the Persian world, Petraeus noted.

¶10. (C) Sleiman said Syria often denies having any knowledge of Al-Qaeda operatives operating within its borders, but in fact they are aware of the activity. The Syrians want to be linked to the Arab world, but they want to have an influential role in the region. Sleiman hinted that now because of the rapprochement between western governments and Syria, Syria believes it can play a larger role in the Arab world.

IRAN

¶11. (C) Sleiman said it would be important to monitor the developments in Iran and asked Petraeus what Iran's role had been in Iraq and Afghanistan. Petraeus replied that Iran remains to be a problem through its support of Shia extremist elements in Iraq who are killing U.S. troops and Iraqi civilians. Iran continues to send arms to Hizballah and Hamas, though the flow of some weapons through the Red Sea and Sudan has been interdicted, Petraeus said. Iran's Revolutionary Guards Corps funds, equips, and trains some Afghan Taliban to fight U.S. soldiers, even though the two are natural adversaries and Iran does not want the Taliban to win. "They want us to bleed," Petraeus said.

¶12. (C) Petraeus noted that the recent protests in Iran exposed a crack in the regime, adding that he did not expect anything revolutionary to occur. The Iranian people did not necessarily vote for opposition presidential candidate Hussein Musavi, but rather cast a vote for change against Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei, Petraeus said. Unfortunately, the Iranians will most likely become more of a police state in the wake of the protests, he said.

¶13. (U) General Petraeus has cleared this message.
SISON